Devotional imagery has often been construed as the starting point for an imaginative flight out of the body. A locus classicus for this point of view is Rudolph Berliner's essay, „God is Love“, in which he argued: „Healthy religious, especially devotional, art is primarily a manifestation of emotional life: it tends to put less emphasis on conformity with the coherent system of codified doctrines, than with emotional religiosity.‖ Looking at medieval images of the broken body of Christ, one is entitled to wonder just what Berliner meant by healthy (Abb. 1). Yet his definition of devotional imagery in terms of affect, that is, private and personal religious response, as opposed to corporate structures of belief, remains operative, even if today most scholars would place greater emphasis on the role of devotional imagery in religious socialization and the degree to which devotional practice increasingly came to involve all the senses, less a flight from, than an immersion in the body. At issue is the extent to which devotional imagery should be seen as having released or restricted the religious imagination, a topic that cannot be considered apart from the social history of mysticism and piety. If one considers devotion a performance, the instruments and instructions of pastoral care compel one to ask what degree devotion did, in fact, remain private and personal. In short, was devotional performance improvised or orchestrated?

For Berliner and other art historians of his generation, the iconographic inventiveness, even idiosyncrasy, of late medieval devotional imagery served as an indicator of the „freedom“ of the medieval artist. This was a subject that had considerable resonance and relevance immediately following World War II and in the early days of the Cold War. To the extent art historians were interested in the imagination, it was the artist’s creative powers that were at issue. Today, the power of the image is located less exclusively in the image itself than in what, following Gombrich, is called the „holder’s share“, construed, however, largely in affective, rather than purely perceptual terms: the way in which works of art structure imaginative, religious, even physical response or, at another level, in which heightened artistic self-consciousness itself can elicit a corresponding self-consciousness in the viewer. It is no secret that in the case of some
are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. In accordance with this touchstone text, theologians, no less than common worshipers, demanded visible proof in matters of faith. If knowledge depended on the senses—and in just what manner and to what degree was a subject of intense debate—then seeing and believing, sight and certitude, were closely linked with one another. At issue in these debates was the nature of the imaginative faculty itself, its powers and its pitfalls. Visions inspired by images can be documented from the entire Middle Ages. But those from the later Middle Ages are distinguished, in part, by the degree to which they develop a self-conscious discourse on the status of images, imaginative experience, and their role in visionary perception. Visions had once served, inter alia, as a means of authorizing new forms of devotional art and practice. By the late Middle Ages, however, the relationship was often reversed: references to venerated forms of art—not simply venerated objects, but venerable modes of sacral representation—sanctioned novel, naturalized forms of visual experience and their incorporation in images. As descriptions or examples of individual encounters with images, visions inspired by works of art embody personal, affective response. But at the same time, they strive for a countervailing authenticity and objectivity, not only of content, but also of process. They are also objective in that their imagery becomes insistently and increasingly concrete, corporeal, and material; they insist, often not without embarrassment, on the truth as something material, sensible, even tangible, in short, as accessible to the imagination. Rather than insisting on the incorporeality of vision, they stake their claim to truth by referring to corporeal images seen with corporeal sight, in particular reliquaries and cult images in the form of statues. The naked truth is no longer invisible; it can be seen and has a body. The patrons who gaze in rapt attention from the wings of early Netherlandish triptychs define a mode of art-historical as well as devotional scrutiny: witness the long tradition of scholarship devoted to the visionary tradition in late medieval art and piety. At least as far as the late Middle Ages is concerned, art historians have been anything but indifferent to the "power of the image." If anything, the expressions of skepticism regarding images, let alone outright hostility, running right through the fifteenth-century, even within the religious mainstream, have been underplayed, as if the period were one of unabashed and unopposed iconophilia. Medieval observers were acutely aware of the capacity of images to provoke vivid imaginative, even visionary, response, an awareness reflected in and cultivated by the images themselves. Yet there was a concurrent tradition of intense skepticism regarding images and their vivifying powers. The ideal of imageless devotion aside—an standard rarely lived up to, even in the monastic tradition—the fear of images was rooted in the recognition that they could deceive through projection, dreams, and hallucinations. An entire genre of pastoral literature was devoted to the "Unterscheidung der Geister" the art of differentiating between trustworthy and unreliable dreams and visions.

Similar ambiguities and uncertainties left their mark on the visual arts. At first glance, Jan van Eyck's Dresden Triptych seems to offer an unobstructed vision of otherworldly splendor (Abb. 2). Yet the Virgin and Child are doubly separated from the donor, first by their isolation at the center, second, by being set back sharply from the picture plane occupied by the donor and his patron saints. The disruption of spatial coherence is deliberate, not an indication of incompetence on the painter's part. Complementing the picture's hallucinatory detail, the built-in pictorial barriers respond to a dilemma and a dialectic. The more persuasively religious images mimicked empirical experience, the more insistently they had to assert their authenticity, that what they showed could simultaneously lay claim to a higher reality. As seeing
came to define believing, the need to assert and safeguard aural authenticity became ever more pronounced. The tension between these opposites—aptly labelled „Schein und Sein“ by Klaus Krüger—underlies or even governs the pictorial structure of many works routinely described as milestones in the progressive conquest of natural appearances in the visual arts.

In this paper, I examine some of the pictorial strategies employed by Jan van Eyck—a consummate master of „naturalism“—to authenticate his images as representations of a higher truth. I then discuss the rhetoric of his images in relation to analogous discourses of vision that can be traced in mystical and devotional literature of the later Middle Ages. My choice of Jan van Eyck, if not entirely incidental, is not necessary to my argument; other images or artists could have been found to exemplify the same or similar ideas. At issue is neither anything so literal as a search for sources nor so speculative as an inquiry into the theological interests (or disinterest) of the artist or his patrons. Instead, I want to explore the way in which medieval modes of response may in fact be normative for all images. Even medieval images, however, provided implicit reflections on the limits of representation by way of questioning or delimiting their own power and potentiality. Spiritual authors could challenge visions inspired by images, even as they accept the legitimacy of images per se. Ironically, most of the texts themselves take the form of reports of visionary experience. The visions rarely give more than a cursory indication of the kind of image involved. But they suggest an anxiety about the authenticity of novel forms of imagery, not only the innovative iconographic types so irksome to theologians, but also new modes of visual expression, in particular, the
naturalism that threatened the unequivocally signa-
tive character of medieval art. Hans Belting has
spoken of a reciprocity of affect between images and
their audiences, a dialogue that comes alive in vision-
ary reports. But the convergence of the image and
the observer also brought with it the need for reassu-
rance that the object of vision represented more than
an illusory projection of devotional desire. Images re-
ponded to these anxieties by incorporating allusions
to sacral distance or dissimilarity (Abb. 3).31
The Madonna of George van der Paele, completed by
Jan van Eyck in 1436, exemplifies the issues in picto-
rial form. The picture simultaneously suggests prox-
mity and distance, temporal as well as spatial. The
Canon gazes at the Madonna and Child, rapt by his
vision of the Virgin. Yet, as has often been observed,
their eyes do not meet. Indeed, van der Paele does not
see with corporeal sight; he has removed his spec-
tacles so as to see the Madonna and Child all the
more clearly with his inner eye. We, too, are transfi-
xed by the image, less perhaps in religious reverence
than in astonishment at the artist’s accomplishment.
The apparent naturalism of every detail, enhanced by
a surface so seamless, so crystalline, that it reveals
hardly a trace of the artist’s hand, allows one to over-
look the conspicuous discrepancy of scale between
the figures and their ecclesiastical setting or, for that
matter, between the archaic, Romanesque forms of
the church and the Gothic architecture of the setting
in which it originally was installed.32 Only on close
inspection does the armor of St. George reveal the re-
fection of the absent artist (and two companions), a
figure of artistic intervention and mediation that dis-
rupts the impression of a seamless illusion represent-
ing no more than the proverbial mirror held up to
nature (Abb. 4).33 The reflection takes up the refer-
ence to the Virgin’s purity inscribed on the frame—
speculum sine macula dei matieatis. It also implies
that the painting itself is a spotless, miraculous mirror. Yet van Eyck does more than merely call attention to his artistic wizardry or even to his presence in his picture. He also holds in check the illusion of unimpeded access to a realm of supernatural experience. The paradoxes present in Jan van Eyck's illusionism belie Michael Camille's remark that the naturalism of fifteenth-century Flemish painting represents, "a vacuous mirror, not a beacon of the imagination." If anything, the demands made by the image of the viewer have increased, not lessened, in complexity compared to those presented by a traditional Sedes sapientiae (Abb. 5). Sculpture and metalwork, however, continued to provide a frame a reference for fifteenth-century images, a framework often literally inscribed within the painting by way of a fictive frame. We can get some measure of the novelty of van Eyck's art if we recall that, from at least the tenth century (and perhaps even earlier) until well into the later Middle Ages, sacred imagery in northern Europe was, with few exceptions, three-dimensional imagery: sculpture and, more specifically, reliquaries. Van Eyck's images play off of these expectations. It is less that van Eyck's images recall or rely on specific cult images, as has sometimes been claimed — indeed, even van Eyck's grisailles frustrate attempts at direct comparison with contemporary sculpture. Instead, their stiff, columnar, stereometric forms define a sculptural mode, one occasionally imitated in later sculptural works. The allusion to sculptural forms is even more explicit in the works of Rogier van Weyden, for example, the Prado Deposition, in which the descriptive and affective naturalism of the figures is effectively countered and contained by the shimmering gold surfaces of the shallow, shrine-like space.

In defining the relationship between imagination and reality, it is therefore misleading, at least from a medievalist's perspective, to refer exclusively to painted imagery, as does the programmatic statement that produced these proceedings (the reference was to "der Anspruch und Wirkung der faktischen, gemalten Bilder"). Using the Middle Ages as a foil for the development of modernity, it developed the contrast between a medieval "Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren, [...]
[die] die Funktion des religiösen Bildes als Membran zu einer unschaulichen, inkommensurablen Wirklichkeit bestimmt" — in short, a conception of the image as a veil or integumentum — and early modern notions of images, which figure „das Bild als Fenster, im Sinne einer transparenten Projektionsfläche, die einen fiktiven Ausblick auf die Wirklichkeit erschließt“ or, in contrast, emphasize its materiality, „seiner Eigenwirklichkeit als Medium“.

Van Eyck's paintings seem destined to deconstruct such schematic categories. Despite their ostensible immediacy and naturalism, his images insist equally on distance and difference. For all their apparent modernity, they still invoke medieval modes of representation. In the van der Paele Madonna, the elements that unmask the image's artifice and reinforce its remove from everyday reality are discreet, yet they nonetheless undercut any notion of the image as a transparent screen or window. And, if nothing else, the picture betrays an intense, even obsessive, interest in materiality, both of the objects it represents and of its own physicality as a work of art. The meaning of the materials extends beyond the symbolic associations with which they were invested in exegesis.

Whereas philosophers, for example, Thomas Aquinas, insisted on the distinction between the art object as such and the object it represents by way of preventing any confusion between the two, i.e., idolatry, van Eyck's attention to light and texture seem to collapse the difference.

This aspect of van Eyck's art reaches its highpoint in the 'Annunciation' in the Thyssen Collection (Abb. 6). The panels present the grisaille Gabriel and Virgin Annunciate as if in the round due to the simu-
ellation of reflections in the burnished stone background. Any attempt to determine where illusion ends and reality begins is frustrated, inter alia, by the doubling of the frame – partly painted, partly carved. As observed by Rudolf Preimesberger, the placement of the shadows and the reflections cast by the two figures suggest that the diptych does not stand fully opened, with its two surfaces aligned in a single plane, but instead with the two panels at a angle slightly less than 180°. Van Eyck's contrivance enhances the effect of two figures actually addressing one another across a real space, not unlike the real volume occupied by the figures within a Byzantine conch mosaic – one thinks, for example, of the Annunciation at Daphni. What Preimesberger does not mention, however, is that the diptych does not merely mimic sculpture; it is a fully realized three-dimensional object designed to have been seen in the round (Abb. 7). Painted to appear like polished black marble, the reverse side of the panels present a wrap-around effect. Once both sides are taken into account, the Thyssen 'Annunciation' no longer merely simulates sculpture, it passes beyond – or at least claims to pass beyond – the realm of representation to assert identity with its object. The panels offer an all-encompassing illusion of a self-contained sacramental object.

A badly damaged Italian Madonna in the Malcove Collection in Toronto exemplifies the type of image which provided van Eyck with his immediate point of departure (Abb. 8). Painted on both sides, it displays on the obverse, an (extensively restored) Virgin based on the Hodegetria icon of Santa Maria del Popolo set off within an interior frame marked by a guilloche motif. The reverse – altogether more remarkable, in spite of its condition – appears as if it were made of green marble. A four-line inscription, unfortunately no longer decipherable, is painted in black letters between incised lines at the bottom of the fictive marble surface (Abb. 9). For this panel, as for van Eyck's, however, the true point of comparison are the precious, polished stones set into altar tables, particularly portable altars (Abb. 10). Van Eyck's Madonnas have been compared to altars, even if not all of his Marian panels were intended as retabiles. As with a reliquary, the panels' purpose is to create an effect of sacramental presence. And like a sacramental object, the image is invested with miraculous powers: the stone dove that heralds the angelic salutation is not attached to the background, but flies unsupported through the luminous atmosphere conjured up by van Eyck in front of the panel's surface. The ultimate conceit of van Eyck's art is not simply that it rivals nature or asserts the superiority of painting over sculpture. In addition to the paragone between media, there is another implicit comparison between God's Creation and the artist's creation, between the Deus Artifex and the Artifex as such. Van Eyck's images, by imitating, but then surpassing, traditional forms of sacramental art, lay claim to supernatural power, presence, and perfection.

Van Eyck's pictures count on, even as they counter, the medieval notion that three-dimensional images, be they reliquaries or cult statues, had a higher claim on reality than a mere picture. Even as images first took on the illusion of a third dimension, commentators suggested the superiority of sculptural effects. For example, the Franciscan Ugo Panziera, a contemporary of Giotto, argued that religious images were a necessity and, moreover, that only in acquiring relief (rilevato) did the image of Christ, first "written in the mind and imagination," then "outlined and shadowed" (disegnato), seem fully incarnate in the mind of the worshipper. In the West, the sophisticated theo-
logy of the icon that justified images as real likenesses was widely regarded as sophistry: only authenticated relics had an acceptable claim on the holy in that they posited actual identity with the body of the saint in heaven. And even relics awaited their ultimate, beatific transformation, intimated in the forms of "speaking" reliquaries that fleshed out in immutable gold and jewels the body parts that they enshrined. Relics aside, all tokens and representations of the divine were simulacra, with one fundamental exception: the Host. Many of the earliest surviving copies or adaptations of icons in Northern and Central Europe, especially in Bohemia, authorize the image by inserting relics into its body or frame, a practice virtually unknown in Byzantium itself, where acheiropoietic images themselves had the status of relics. A rare Netherlandish example, dating to within van Eyck's lifetime, occurs in the Norfolk Triptych, painted ca. 1415-20, in which a small piece of coniferous wood, a relic of the True Cross, was inserted in the oak panel immediately below the representation of the Man of Sorrows surrounded by the relics of the Passion known as the arca Christi. In the Norfolk Triptych, the relic guarantees the identity of the Man of Sorrows with the body of Christ, identical, in turn, with the consecrated Host. Acheiropoietoi - images not made by human hands - were, beside the Host, the only objects acknowledged as somehow participating in the persons they represented. The prime example was the Veronica, which often served as a symbol of the Host: both image and relic, and yet, by definition, not identical with its ultimate original, Christ, whose body, of course, remained out of sight in heaven.

Medieval mystics sought to authenticate their visions by associating them with the body of Christ, his saints, and their visual representations, both icons and relics. In addition to icons, sculptural, plastic forms provided a standard of authenticity, as if to counter any claims that visions rooted in the transitory and evanescent imagery of sensory experience and the imagination were inevitably unreliable. For example, a vision of the Veronica attributed to the thirteenth-century Cistercian, Mechthild of Hackeborn, recounts that she saw the faithful carrying their sins in their bones (portantes peccata sua in humeris suis), then placing them as offerings at the feet of the Lord, where they are transformed into gifts in the form of golden vessels whose forms vary according to
the nature of the supplicant's sins. The passage conjures up reliquaries of a kind with which Mechthild and her audience would have been familiar. To the bodiless visage of Christ, Mechthild's vision conjoins the transformed and beatified bodies of the faithful. A vision from the life of Lukardis of Oberweimar (1274–1309), another Cistercian and a contemporary of Mechthild's, brings all of these concepts – imagination and vision, body and relic, remembrance and imitation – together in a single, succinct formulation spoken by Christ, who appears to the author as if at the Last Judgment, holding Lukardis to his chest in a close embrace, like St. John at the Last Supper (or in a Christus-Johannes-Gruppe): And because the memory of the yoke of my most bitter suffering was always impressed [insculpta] upon the innermost imagination of her heart [imaginari interius cordi], I have considered this doorway to the eyes of all the faithful worthy of receiving the imprint of the stigmata of my Passion in the testimony of her body. Lukardis is not merely a living image of the triumphant Christ who will display his wounds at the Second Coming, she is a living cult image, visible to all the faithful, carved, like Christ, with the signs of the stigmata. To legitimize an image by identifying it as or with a relic was hardly an uncommon strategy: witness this story from the late thirteenth-century chronicle of the convent of Unterlindel in Colmar, according to which Gertrude of Bruges saw the Sedes sapientiae in the choir come to life corporeis oculis visibiliter, visibly with her corporal eyes. In response to her ardent prayers, the seated Christ Child stretches out his hand; taking it in her own, Gertrude finds that it has come loose from the image and can not be re-attached, no matter how often it is attempted. Even a venerated cult image might be suspect as an idol if it did not simultaneously serve as a reliquary – hence the chronicle's insistence that sancta illa hymago manu diuinatatis is housed privately in the cloister as if it were itself a body relic.

Van Eyck's religious paintings, with their shimmering surfaces and lustrous forms, let alone their direct imitations of gold and jewels, frequently refer to the aesthetic of reliquaries. As in reliquaries, the bodies of the saints are enclosed in frames that present and interpret their contents. More powerfully than virtually any other element in his paintings, Van Eyck's frames insist on his mediating role as an artist and on the relationship between image and viewer as part of their subject matter. Van Eyck's van der Paele Madonna is framed for us literally and metaphorically: literally, through the ambiguous bordering elements, with their simulated sculpted inscriptions, that set the image apart, even as they break down the barrier between the world of the observer and that inhabited by the persons in the painting, just as van der Paele seeks to break down the barrier dividing him from a higher reality; metaphorically, by showing us, not simply a Madonna on which we can meditate, but an image of a proxy figure, in this case, George van der Paele, who experiences the vision to which we as viewers nominally aspire and for whom we, in turn, should pray. A text from the circle of Rulman Merswin (1307–1382), a lay author of mystical texts and a so-called „Gottesfreund“, offers a similar framing of a visionary experience, not to enhance its reality effect, but to distance the reader and encourage him or her to approach all such reports with circumspection. The text, known simply as the 'Dialogue of a monk with a young priest named Walter,' dates to the middle of the fourteenth century. The didactic exchange opens with a statement of purpose: This is an exemplar of the great, fathomless goodness and mercy of God, which by
rights should compel all sinners to engage in true contrition, and by which they can also be taught how they should conduct themselves after conversion. The conversion experience takes the form, not simply of a vision, but of a commentary on the perils of visionary experience. As he is saying Mass, the young, i.e., inexperienced, priest sees— or thinks he sees—the statue of the Madonna on the altar shining with an unbearable brightness: [he performed the Mass with] many large sights and with running eyes. And when he elevated the Host with great effort and had given the blessing and turned back toward the altar, he then saw instantaneously in its place an image of the Virgin so beautiful and gracious that he could not bear its brilliant clarity. The reference to the Mass as the trigger or starting point for visionary experience is hardly accidental—the overwhelming majority of visionary experiences reported in late medieval chronicles and vitae take reception of the Eucharist as their starting point. The priest falls into a trance and only awakens after a monk, who notices that something unusual has occurred, takes him to one side and comforts him (it appears to me that you saw an unusual sight), to which the priest eventually replies: as the Mass came to an end, I saw with my bodily eyes the most beautiful image of the Virgin standing in front of me on the altar. It looked at me in a friendly manner; then it leaned towards me and disappeared just as quickly. And I thought to myself that I had found a great power ['grosse Kraft'] in my nature. There follows the predictable caution from the wise and experienced monk:

Dear son, I wish to say to you that it was an image of our beloved lady, the loving mother who is a helper and comforter to all remorseful sinners in all of their works. But know that it was not God's mother as she is in her everlasting and eternal essence in herself, and had you seen her in clarity, and were it then possible that your bodily eyes had all the power of eyesight that they ever have or shall have on this earth, and were it then possible that the clarity of the vision were enclosed all alone in your eyes, then you would have been blinded on that very spot... should it ever happen again that such images be moved for you in the same or in any other way, do not dismiss it, instead tell me about it, otherwise you sometimes might well be deceived, for such things are not always to be trusted or believed, and it is a fact that the evil, foul spirits in the air can inhabit many images, with which they gladly bring simple people into error and spiritual pride. And see, my beloved son, it's a small thing that a person finds in pictorial form, and you should know that it's very far removed from the best and closest that a person probably can attain here in this world with the help of God.

The wise monk's discourse on the dangers of visions owes much to the more radical rejection of imaginative experience elaborated in the concluding section of Henry Suso's so-called autobiography. There, in chapters 46–53, the Dominican (ca. 1295–1363) explains the highest mysteries of the spiritual life to Elisabeth Stagel, his spiritual daughter, just as in the dialogue, the monk instructs the priest. Whereas the dialogue addresses images of the Virgin, Suso explicates the paradox of the Trinity, urging Stagel to open your inward eyes and behold, if you can, this being as it is in its simple purity. In his famous formulation of the apophatic way, Suso then instructs Stagel to drive out one image with another, even though the Godhead, no matter what one compares it to, is still a thousand times more unlike than like. To the question of how to distinguish between pure truth and dubious vision originating in sense knowledge, how to check the truth of a vision a person has in his sleep, if this can or should be a prophetic vision—the very issues raised by the dialogue attributed to Merswin—Suso responds with the acid-test of experience: No one can explain this to another just with words. One knows it by experiencing it ('der merkt es, der es empfinden hat').

Suso's teaching reaches its climax with the lesson that every vision, the more intellectual and free of images it is and the more like this same pure seeing [i.e., 'direct sight of the naked Godhead'], the nobler it is. In this wild, foreign terrain, deep, bottomless abyss, stillness of the transfigured, resplendent darkness in the naked, simple unity [...] bereft of mode—terms derived from Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius—there lies the most sublime happiness. Suso stresses that in this wild mountain region of the 'where' beyond God, there is no place for devotional imagery, not even the images that, in the very same work, Suso employs to illustrate his text, recommends to his readers, and describes himself as having employed as a novice. To see Christ—to be freed from the forms of creatures, formed with Christ, and transformed in the Godhead—the contemplative needs to invert the normal process of empirical perception as understood in Suso's day. Suso's formulation transposes terminology borrowed from the Aristotelian and Augustinian psychology taught in the schools: the eye should not look outward unless it carries images forth. [...] Close your sense to all forms you encounter. Free yourself from everything your external judgment chooses, which binds your will and causes pleasure to your memory. Suso's mystical teaching represents nothing less than a systematic, step-by-step short-circuiting of the imaginative process.

Suso's discourse against the imagination and the text attributed to Merswin, whose confessor was the Dominican, John Tauler, find a larger context in the Order's
And one time, new paintings had been made in the choir, and her desire directed toward them was so great — indeed without measure — that she gladly would have looked at them. But she withstood her curiosity so steadfastly that she never wanted to see them. And thereby God made her worthy, so that one day, as she received God [i.e., the Eucharist], she saw the heavens open all the while that she went through the choir to the high altar, where she received God. Thus our Lord gave her recompense for so small and transitory a sight with so great and worthy a vision.

One has only to think of the representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem on the vaults of medieval churches, for example, the vault immediately above the altar in the nuns’ choir at Wienhausen in Saxony, to grasp the scope of Metzi’s visual asceticism. (Abb. 11) In the spirit of Merswin’s and Suso’s admonitions, images are devalued over and against the one true vision, linked to reception of the Eucharist. Only the body of Christ, administered by the priesthood, and not images, offers a legitimate vehicle of divine elevation. A still more forceful severing of images and authentic visionary experience occurs in the chronicle of the
Dominican convent of Weiler. The nun, Guta Jün- 
gin93,
longed… with great devotion to see the desirable face of our Lord as he himself impressed it on a cloth. And the woman estimated quite piously that she deserved to receive this from him. At the same time, she thought she was in the presence of an angel who spoke with her like one person to another, and said: 'God will work a miracle with you.' Then he disappeared from her. That same day, as she was by her prayers at Vespers, she saw a clear light and realized that she had embraced God, body and soul. And she looked into herself and saw that her heart and her soul and her spirit were entirely open, and that the face of our Lord was shining into her soul. And then it was said to her: 'that is my face, not the one that Veronica received, but my true and divine face, the one that should remain eternally in your soul.' And this she took as a token, so that afterwards the same face appeared and shone once again in her soul.

The story offers an exemplum on the nature of imitation and representation. Enlightened by the angel, Guta realizes that, once she has taken Christ into her heart, she reflects his true image more faithfully than the mere material object received by Veronica. Yet the exemplum only functions by taking familiarity with images of the Veronica for granted. Arguing that the reformation of the soul matters more than mere outward conformity, the chronicle admonishes against too literal an understanding of images, icons included: a „true image“ is unmasked as untrue or, at best, or partially like the true object it seeks to represent. True vision, the exemplum advises, depends neither on the body nor on its representations. Vision is defined as a form of spiritual insight that ultimately dispenses with all material representations, even the Vera Ikone itself. The visio Dei is in every sense beyond imagination92.

The stories about images scattered throughout the Dominican chronicles never quite coalesce to form a coherent argument. Nonetheless, the uneasy coexistence of extravagant claims for works of art with tales undermining those claims suggests a lively debate concerning the legitimacy of images. Disquietude over devotional imagery also informs contemporary texts such as the 'Legatus divinae piétatis' – both the section written by Gertrude of Helfta (Book II) and those compiled by a follower or followers (Books I & III–V) – which returns repeatedly to the self-conscious defense of visionary experience, including visions shaped by works of art93. Gertrude (1256–1301/1302) and the nun writing under her name often have Christ himself take up the defense of images. In effect, Christ, reflecting age-old arguments linking the Incarnation to justifications of pictorial representation, offers himself up as the ultimate union of image and exemplar94. For example, Book III describes how Gertrude, while meditating on the Passion, placed an image of the crucified Christ in a sepulcher, as if in play (quasi ludendo)95. The context suggests a dead Christ much smaller than the large-scale figures placed in Easter Sepulchers96. When Gertrude doubts whether Christ can take pleasure in a devotion that engages the senses more than the spirit (Et quid, amantissime Deus, ex tali deletatione poteris habere, quae magis sensualiter deservit quam spiritum?), Christ, using an unlikely comparison, replies that he, like a greedy usurer, eagerly accepts every token of affection.

Gertrude's affirmation of corporeal imagery, confirmed by Christ, could not differ more emphatically from the guarded apologies offered in earlier visionary literature, for example, the account of Alpais de Cudot († 1211), written before 1180, whose confessor explains that the visionary sometimes saw the souls of the dead (animae defunctorum) in that corporeal form (in eadem specie corporal) in which they customarily appear to the sleeping, but that she was in fact able to perceive them in their simple natures, unencumbered by the flesh, that is, without bodies (in sua natura simplices, carnis onere praepeptiti)97. In this construction, corporeal similitudes are no more than concessions to human weakness, above all the weakness of the author, who acknowledges that he cannot enter into the incorporeal secrets revealed to Alpais herself98. Whereas the author and his audience must make do with corporeal similitudes as demonstrations of spiritual things (corporibus similias ad demonstrationem spiritualium), the contemplative, in contrast, can read celestial signs (caelestia contemplationis signa)99.

For Gertrude, as for her contemporaries, statuary and relics continue to set the standard for auratic authenticity. Gertrude repeatedly defines the process of mystical union in terms of images impressed in or sculpted on the imagination of the heart: so much so that her co-author, summarizing her attainments in Book I, remarks that it was a pleasure among the other nuns to say that the purity of her heart was such that it could have been placed on the altar with the reliquaries (perhaps also a reference to the practice of separate burial for vital organs)100. This passing remark refers to what Gertrude herself defines as one of her two most treasured moments of mystical union, the first, her receiving the wound of love (Book II, chapter 5, based on Song of Songs 4,9, Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse), the second, her receiving the seal of love on her heart (Book II, chapter 7, based on Song of Songs 8,6, Put
me as a seal upon thy heart). If, in the first instance, Gertrude’s heart is pierced by Christ, in the second, Christ’s heart is penetrated by Gertrude. On the Feast of the Purification, following reception of the Eucharist, Gertrude sees her soul, like soft wax, applied to Christ’s heart, whose imprint it receives as if from a seal matrix (\textit{quasi sigillo imprimitam Dominico pectori})\textsuperscript{102}. Gertrude then sees her soul swell and permeate Christ’s chest, which she compares in turn to a reliquary (\textit{thesaurarium}) filled bodily (\textit{corponerius}) with the plenitude of the Divinity (\textit{plentitudo divinitatis}) — a paraphrase of Colossians 2.9 (\textit{for in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally}). At Quingagesima, Gertrude revisits her experience, reminding herself (and the reader) that the invisible truths of the divinity can be made manifest to the sensible intellect through the means of created things (\textit{Sed quia invisibilibia Dei per ea quae facta sunt ad intellectum exteriorem exprimi possunt}), a paraphrase of Romans 1.20: for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made\textsuperscript{103}. Gertrude uses the passage from Paul to authorize and authenticate her own vision, which concludes with the ardor of Christ’s Passion liquefying the wax impressed upon it until the material is absorbed ineffably into the Divinity\textsuperscript{104}. Mystics often likened union to the process by which hot wax took on the form of a seal matrix, adopting language developed in the context of twelfth-century debates over the \textit{imago dei} and eucharistic theology\textsuperscript{105}. Gertrude links this imagery to its source in Aristotle’s \textit{De Anima} (424a, 17–21)\textsuperscript{106}. In Aristotle’s account, the process by which the mind perceives an object is compared to impressionable wax taking on the form of the seal without assuming any of its matter. Yet Gertrude’s account is unusual in two respects. First, she uses the metaphor to emphasize a corporeal likeness rather than a resemblance merely formal in nature (expressed through the imprinting of the seal’s shape without the imparting of any of its matter). Twelfth-century texts stress the fundamental disparity between the \textit{imago Dei} in man and in Christ (God’s one and only true image) by comparing the two to “the son of a king (Christ) and the form of his impressed seal”\textsuperscript{107}. In contrast, Gertrude goes out of her way to emphasize complete assimilation to the body of Christ. Gertrude’s soul assumes \textit{Christiformitas} in taking on sculptural form (the shape of the matrix); moreover, her union with the Godhead is consummated with the soul being taken into the reliquary of Christ’s heart, i.e., in becoming a relic. A mystical progress that one expects to move away from the material in fact leads in exactly the opposite direction: from soul to body\textsuperscript{108}. The invocation of Aristotelian doctrine attributed to Gertrude predates by over 200 years the defense of images published in 1522 by Hieronymus Emser: \textit{Dann man, wie auch Aristotes leret, in unserm vorstand nichtzig bringen mag, anders dann durch die fiimpf euwerlichen synne, also das wir das so wir lernen, vorstellen, oder erkennen wollen tvzuvor durch sehen, boren, richen, schmecken oder greessen, teu gemut furen mussen}. Gertrude, however, was hardly an isolated figure in applying sculptural imagery to the process of perception, be it natural or mystical. Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century texts on optics use a variety of terms for the "imprint" made by images on the eye, some of which could be used interchangeably for works of art or visions, e.g., \textit{similitudo, imago, idolum, phantasma, simulacrum, forma, intenio, impressio, passio\textsuperscript{110}}. So pervasive was the terminology of sculpting in accounts of perception that the active intellect itself could be characterized as a sculptor, whittling away all superfluities from the sensory data supplied to it by the imagination. For example, in his defense of images, \textit{De cultu imaginum}, Thomas Netter (1377–1430), the English theologian compares intellectual abstraction to the process by which a sculptor reveals or uncovers the image on which he is working: \textit{quod sicut de rudi lapide per circumcensionem superflue, & adhibitionem speciei artis paulatim procedit imago sculpta; ita per detersionem cogitatio [... intellectus generat sibi veram ejus scientiam, & quasi suam imaginem\textsuperscript{111}}. Only a metaphor, one might argue, yet the intrusion of the imagery of imprinting and sculpting into accounts of perception raises the question to what degree the desire to legitimate images as instruments of devotion in turn sanctioned novel accounts of visual and visionary experience. If seeing itself could be likened to the manufacture of images, then it followed quite easily that natural and supernatural modes of apprehension represented part of a continuum. The visions of Gertrude of Helfta systematically root spiritual knowledge in sensory experience as part of an epistemology of mystical experience. In this limited sense, her project differs little from that of her great contemporary, Bonaventure, the program of whose \textit{Itinerarium mentis in deum} can effectively be summarized by the phrase, \textit{per visibilia ad invisibilia}. There is no evidence that Gertrude knew Bonaventure’s writings; both elaborate on Victorine theology\textsuperscript{112}. In Gertrude’s visionary piety, however, \textit{visibilia} have come to a far more predominant role. Whereas the \textit{Itinerarium} concludes by paraphrasing the pseudo-Dionysius to the effect that God resides in a \textit{darkness which fills invisible intellects full above all plenitude with the splendors of invisible good things that are above all good}, Gertrude, in an extraordinary gloss on the
Gregorian dictum, concludes by observing that, just as students attain to logic by way of the alphabet, so too, by means of these painted pictures (istas depictas imaginaciones), as it were, they may be led to taste within themselves that hidden manna [Rev. 2.17], which it is not possible to adulterate by any admixture of material images and of which one must have eaten for it forever (ad gustandum intra te manna illud absconditum, quad nulla corporearum imaginacionem admixtione valet partis). Far from sops thrown to the illiterati visions based on corporeal images have here become the food of angels.

Gertrude was hardly the first to use Romans 1.20 to argue that, in Bonaventure’s words, We may behold God in the mirror of his visible creation, not only by considering creatures as vestiges of God, but also by seeing Him in them. Yet the concept can be traced to roots much deeper than the Franciscan “natural philosophy” with which it is most often associated. Indeed, it finds one of its most important, if not necessarily immediate, source, not in philosophical inquiry into “Nature” and the cosmos, but in the monastic tradition of affective piety. In his sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard argued.

We indeed continue to live after the body’s death, but only by means of the body through do we gain those merits that lead to a life of blessedness. St. Paul sensed this, saying: “The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made.” All creatures that he has made, creatures that possess a body and are therefore visible, can be understood by our minds only through the body’s instrumentality. Therefore our souls have need of a body. Without it we cannot attain to that form of knowledge by which alone we are elevated toward the contemplation of truths essential to happiness.

Yet Gertrude is far more than a product of her genealogy. As is well known, Bernard tended to depreciated art, regarding it as a distraction from contemplation. In the writings associated with Gertrude, however, works of art are themselves considered instruments capable of elevating the mind to the contemplation of essential truths; they play an instrumental role in precipitating and guiding devotional response. Gertrude’s spirituality is exemplary of later, lay piety in that it was enacted, perforce, at a remove from the altar, the privileged site of mystical experience. The various forms of devotional imagery that proliferated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – prayer books, dipycys, and the triptychs misleadingly identified as “house altars” – are less liturgical than paraliturgical in character; nuns and the laity sought them out as intermediaries and substitutes for “real presence.” By embodying and evoking heightened states of vision, they served as privileged sites of access to the divine.

Rooting mystical phenomena in sensory experience and, more specifically, in images, integrated mystical theology with a universal epistemology, yet it also threatened the exclusiveness of mystical insight. It also tended to level distinctions between mystical, visionary, and visual experience. It is against this background that one must read systematic expressions of concern, even consternation, about the use of images as stimuli to visionary experience, which first occur with any regularity in the thirteenth century, before becoming commonplace in the later Middle Ages. The strictures and provisions could simply be considered an inevitable accompaniment to the flood of pastoral literature addressed to the laity, nuns, and novices following the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council. But their increased occurrence coincides with a heightened emphasis on “real presence” in both the Eucharist and the works of art employed to orchestrate its performance. Once again, van Eyck provides a memorable image of the convergence of liturgical and pictorial naturalism: on the interior of the Ghent altarpiece, the conduit that channels the sacramental water from sacrificial Lamb atop the well of living waters at the center of the terrestrial paradise leads directly to the chalice on the actual altar supporting the picture.

To insist, as does the Ghent Altarpiece, on the accessibility of spiritual truths to corporeal sight does not, in itself, entail vulgarization. The nuns of Helfta were not members of the laity any more than the group represented by the priest Walter. To be sure, Helfta is worlds apart from the court of Burgundy inhabited by Jan van Eyck and his patrons: neither Gertrude’s nor van Eyck’s discourse on images and the imagination form part of a single, uniform development. Both, however, participate in a larger debate over seeing and believing, the suspicion of sight and the authenticity of vision in late medieval art and devotion. To read van Eyck’s images in relation to discourses of vision elaborated in devotional literature is not to make of the artist and his patrons either mystics or theologians, nor to underestimate the extent to which his images are invested with worldly agendas and concerns. It is, rather, to question the place of empirical experience in devotional practice, a process of questioning implicit in the images themselves.

Seen in this light, van Eyck’s images allow some general conclusions on the function of naturalism in late medieval art. Repeated assaults on Panofsky’s concept of disguised symbolism have still not dismantled the opposition between religious and empirical experience that underlies the various antitheses – text vs. image, sacred vs. secular, symbolism vs. naturalism,
medieval vs. modern – that structure scholarship on Early Netherlandish painting. Van Eyck’s pictorial rhetoric may mark the emergence of what Victor Stoichita has aptly called the “self-aware image.” Yet his mimetic strategies need not be seen exclusively in terms of the evolution from “image” to “art”, to use Belting’s terminology. Artistic self-consciousness does not necessarily undermine religious response; it can also be used to heighten and refine devotional experience. Indeed, the ultimate challenge of van Eyck’s religious paintings is that they appear to appropriate the Pauline notion of “invisible things seen clearly by the things that are made”, and apply it, not to the world created by the hand of God, but to the images fashioned by the hand of the artist. Despite their apparent naturalism, van Eyck’s panels still question to what degree imagery rooted in sensory experience can have any purchase on what, within the framework of Christian cosmology, is “really real”, and what, in mystical terminology, is the only reality: the invisible Truth of the Godhead. And unlike the brutal images of the Passion that made up the stock-in-trade of late medieval devotional art, van Eyck’s reserved, regal Madonnas do not lend themselves to explanation in terms of an “incarnational aesthetic”, an emphasis on Christian reality as Hegel and, later, Auerbach, understood it: the humble, ugly, and unidealized. They seek their authentication elsewhere, in the exquisite, beautiful, and beatified forms and in the impeccable and seemingly immutable materials of sacral art: the church itself, both as structure and metaphor, icons, the cult statue, and the glittering, crystalline structures of reliquaries. By taking, not just nature, but other works of sacral art as his primary point of reference, Jan van Eyck links his images with established forms of art and all they represented, even as he self-consciously sets out to surpass them. His sacred imagery may represent, to borrow Panofsky’s anachronistic term, an art nova; a dramatic break with the conceptual and symbolic conventions of medieval art. But at its core it remains – or at least claims to remain – art sacra.

Notes

1 For their helpful comments, my thanks to Caroline Bynum, Alexander Nagel, Nigel Palmer, and, above all, James Marrow, to whose lectures on van Eyck experienced in the classroom some twenty years ago I owe the germ of many of the ideas elaborated in this essay.
2 See Rudolph Berliner, God is Love, in: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Series 6, 42 (1953), pp. 9-26, esp. p. 18; the quotation continues, “the term being understood as covering true mysticism as well as the naïve reactions of individuals souls or groups to the doctrines of the church and the experiences of life”. See also Rudolph Berliner, The Freedom of Medieval Art, in: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Series 6, 28 (1945), pp. 263-288.
8 For physical response, see, e.g., Freedberg (n. 2); for artistic self-consciousness, see James H. Marrow, Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and

8 See Hamburger (n. 2). The term, "visual culture", remains hotly contested; see Questionnaire on Visual Culture. October 77 (1996), pp. 25–70.


14 There is, as far as I know, no study that focuses specifically on the various modes of vision—corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual—that are described and explained in medieval visionary literature. Sixten Ringborn, Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions. Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Piety, 159–170, touches on the subject in so far as it relates to works of art. For example, in the late thirteenth-century Vitea sororum of Unterlinden, one nun sees Mary with corporal sight; see Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, Les Vitea Sororum d'Unterlinden. Edition critique du manuscrit 580 de la Bibliothèque de Colmar, in: Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge 5 (1930), pp. 317–509, esp. 409. In what seems a deliberate contrast, another nun sees the Trinity mundilifus oculus (Ancelet-Hustache, p. 442). Elsewhere in the same text, Christ and the Virgin appear visibiliter (Ancelet-Hustache, p. 431).


21 See Michael Camille, The Gothic Idol, Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art, Cambridge 1989, esp. p. 213: "Duplicity is only possible because there are ambiguities between life and art and because Gothic statues, unlike their Romanesque ancestors, now looked very much like human bodies."


24 In relating van Eyck's religious paintings to issues in devotional texts of the later Middle Ages, I do not mean to exclude from consideration what Craig Harbison, following Michael Baxandall, has called "secular satisfactions". See Craig Harbison, The Northern Altarpiece as a Cultural Document, in: Humphrey and Kemp (n. 22), pp. 49-75, and, for a similar approach, Linda Seidel, The Value of Verism in the Art of Jan van Eyck, in: Daniel Poiron and Nancy F. Regalado (eds.), Contexts. Styles and Values in Medieval Art and Literature (Yale French Studies, special issue), New Haven 1991, pp. 25-43.


27 At times these reservations were made explicit by means of inscriptions; see, e.g., Jack M. Greenstein, On Alberti's 'Sign,' Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting, in: Art Bulletin 79 (1998), pp. 669-698, esp. 672-680.


30 Hans Belting, Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter. Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion, Berlin 1981, p. 98: "Betrachterperson und Bildperson waren miteinander beginnend, die Betrachterperson suchte sich der Bildfigur anzuschließen und forderte von dieser die Lebendigkeit zurück, die sie selbst besaß. ... Im Gegenzug zur progressiven Bildlosigkeit, die die Mystik von Individuum verlangte, wurde das Bild immer körperlicher und immer geprägter, wie es sich das Individuum vom Dialog als seiner Selbstbestätigung wünschte."

31 I am not first to observe this: see, for example, Harbison (n. 15), pp. 110-111, who refers to "devices to indicate if necessary the sanctity or visionary nature of their painted exterior environments." See, too, Georges Didi-Huberman, Fra Angelico, Dissemblance und Figuration, trans. Jane M. Todd, Chicago 1995.

32 The original location of the panel is not precisely known, but, as argued by Maximilian J. Martens, Het onderzoek naar de opdrachtgevers, in: Bernhard Ridderbos and Henk van Veen, 'Om iets te weten van de oude meesters.' De Vlaamse Primitieven. Herontdekking, Wadering en Onderzoek, Nijmegen 1995, pp. 349-353, esp. pp. 374-388, it almost certainly served as the donor's epitaph in the chapel of Sts. Peter and Paul in the south aisle of the church of St. Donatian in Bruges.


34 As noted by Farmer (n. 33), who observes how the reflections distance the artist and the viewer from the immediate access to the Virgin enjoyed by van der Paele himself. Saumra-Jeltsch (n. 23), p. 407, contrasts the accessibility and immediacy of van Eyck's images to those of succeeding generations, which, in her view, insist more emphatically on distance between image and viewer 'wenn als oberste Instanz die Heilige Schrift bewahrt zu können'. Yet, as Saumra-Jeltsch, p. 412-13, acknowledges, 'Das Spiel mit Realitäten gewinnt gerade bei ihm [van Eyck] einen übergeordneten, metaphysischen Bezug.'


36 See Ilene Forsyth, The Throne of Wisdom. Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France, Princenton 1972. For the example reproduced here, see Robert Didier, La Sedes, la Vierge et le saint Jean au Calvaire de l'église Saint-Jean à Liège et la sculpture mosane de la première moitié du XIIe siècle, in: Joseph Deckers (ed.), La collégiale Saint-Jean de Liège. Mille

See the passage from Aquinas quoted by Camille (n. 21), p. 207.


For this effect, see Otto Demus, Byzantine Mosaic Decoration, Boston 1955.

According to the technical report in Eisler (n. 47), p. 55, the marbleizing is "doubtless original", yet Eisler maintains, p. 56, that "too little remains to make any certain judgement as to authorship. Plain marbleing defies secure assignment under the best circumstances". The two opinions are not necessarily contradictory; the marbleizing could have been carried out by an assistant. For a fuller discussion, see Emil Bossard, Revealing van Eyck. The Examination of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Annunciation, in: Apollo 136 (1992), pp. 4-11.

polished marble underscores the painter's artistry, even as it enhances the effect of permanence and sacral presence.

51 A point also made by Hana Hlaváč-ková and Hana Seifertová, "La Madone de Most. Imitation et symbole, in: Revue de l'Art 67 (1985), pp. 59–65, esp. pp. 60–61, who note concerning a group of Bohemian panels of the Virgin, "La majorité invite du marbre ou un métal précieux remplissant l'en-cadrement, et leur allure extérieure se rappoche alors de celle d'un simple autel portatif". The authors further note that such double-sided panels were often set on socles so as to stand on altars and that "l'objet tour entier – panneau, diptyque ou triptyque – était alors comparable à un reliquaire".


56 Quoted and translated by Summers (n. 9), pp. 313–314.

66 de Smelt (n. 65), p. 350. Et sicut memoria iugis meae passionis amarissimae interius cordi eius semper imaginario insculpta non defuit, sic foris ad oculum omnium fidei in testimonia corpori eius meae passionis stigmata dignum imprimere reputavi.


69 See Harbison (n. 15), p. 108: “something sacred had to be cut out, distinguished from all the rest. [...] The painting was a precious, isolated object, like a relic; it was encased or enclosed by traceder, marbleized frames which were meant at least partly to certify its holiness.”


71 Martens (n. 32) stresses the religious function of the image in its capacity as an epigraph.


73 Strauch (n. 72), p. 60: Dies ist ein exemplar der grossen grun-desen gute und erbermede gottes, das billiche alle sünner reissen sol zü eine geworen ruwen und do bi sü oach mögneteler geeritten werden, wie sü sich halten sülente noch der bekernd.

74 Strauch (n. 72), pp. 63–65: und er ter die messe mit manigem gross en sützen und mit flessenden ougen, und do er die messe mit gross erbeut us brohte und den segen gegehen hette und sich wider umb gegen dem alter gekerter hette, so siht er rehte an stette das aller schönste münkenflichste frowenbilde, das er der schönen clorhet niht erliden mòhte.

75 See Béatrice W. Acklin Zimmermann, Gott im Denken Brethren. Die theologischen Implikationen der Nonnenwiten (Dokimion 14), Fribourg 1993, pp. 57–118.

76 Strauch (n. 72): und er neigete sich also uffe den alter, und der alte brüder nam sin war und satte in balde an dem alter nider uffe einen sessel und do was er von ime selber kummen, und do lies er in rehte in der rüwe unzte das er wider zü ime selber kam, und do er wider zü ime selber kam, do lies er einen st-archen sützen. [...] mir ist aber wol, lieber sun, du habest er-twas sundere gesiht gesiht. [...] ‘do die messe vollebroht wart, do sach ich mit minen liplichen augen das aller schönesten münkenflichsten frowenbilde vor mir uffe dem alter sten, unde sach mich das alsal gar früchtliche ane und an stette do neigete es mir und was aucht do an stette ineig, und duncker mich des, das ich grosse kraft in mirer naturen befinde haben.’

77 Strauch (n. 72): lieber sun, ich wil dir sagen, es ist ein bilde von unserer lieben frowen gesin, der lieben mütter, die allen wider kerenden sundieren eine helfen in und ein trösterin in allen iren erbeiten ist. aber wisses das, das es niht die mütter gottes ist gesin, also sü in dem iwemer wereden ewigen we-seende an ir selber ist, und sollete du sü in der clorheit also gesehen haben, und ware es denne mütlich, das die liplichen ougen aller der ougen kraft hetten, [65] die ie uffe das esseri-cke komt oder iemer dar uf kummen söllent, und ware es denne mütlich, das die clorheit der gesiht alle alleinein de-en ougen alleine beslossen were, du müstest noch denne an der selbselne stette erblendet sin. ich wil dir sagen, liebersun, du soll unsere lieben frowen danken des grossen gütes, das sü dir in irme bide grosse kraft gesandet hat. aber ich wil dir sa- gen, das bide das du ni zu mole gesehen hat, das ist noch an dir.
gut gesin, als es noch umb dich stort. aber beschmacht es nu me hin, das dir die soliche bilde in der selben wise oder in einer andern wise fur gehebet werdent, so nut enlos, du sagest mir ansettte, anders du mohest zu ertelten ziren wol betrogen werden, wennne istu nitallwegezt zü gliedende noch zü getruende, und ist das sache, das die boesn uben geste in den lüfen wol vil und maniger hande bilde an sich genemen könnt, so mutte si einelgelte menner gerne in irunuge und in etu- sisthe hoffart brechent, unde sich, lieber sun, es ist ein klei- nes ding, das der mensche in biderlicher forme befindet, und du solt wissen, das es noch gar ver von dem besten und von den nehesten ist, do der mensche hie in der zit mit der helfe gottes wol zu kumen mag.

For Suso on visions and visionary experience, see Alois. M. Haas, Kunst rechter Gelassenheit. Themen und Schwerpunkte von Heinrich Seuse Mystik, Bern 1955, pp. 179–120.


Henry Suso (n. 79), p. 201; Heinrich Seuse (n. 79), p. 191: Wann man glichmüt dem gis, so ist es noh tunsentval ungelicher, des daz gis si. Aber doch, daz man bil mit bilten us tribe, etc.


Henry Suso (n. 79), p. 195; Heinrich Seuse (n. 79), p. 183; und ein idelchlich vision, so si vennümer unnatural and bildlicher ist und der selben blesser schowing ic glicher ist, so si ic edel ist. Ebenfalls als allumrichtender, der in der grünlichen dunsternheit der in blosen einvaltgren einiket. Und in disen entwistern [...], etc.


Henry Suso (n. 79), p. 184; Heinrich Seuse (n. 79), p. 168; Ein gelassen mensch muss entbildet werden von der creatur, gebildet werden mit Cristo, und übereilt in der gotterheit.

Henry Suso (n. 79), pp. 184–185; Heinrich Seuse (n. 79), p. 167–168: Daz oge sol nit ussehens han, es hab denn ein sturgen der bilden. [...] Hab ein beschilleisen der sinnen vor allen gegenwürtigen formen. Bis lidig alles dasz, daz du unoffenbarlich bescheidenhaft us erwollet, daz den willen behelbet und der högnüst wollust in trai. Die passage comings towards the end of an extended contrast between those who “lead a life based on reason” that “shines back into them with hidden truth, as heaven shines in its brilliant stars”, and those “people appearing to be good”, in whom „the light of reason is directed outward not inward”. See Henry Suso (n. 79), pp. 174–185.


J. König, Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen. Freiburger Diözesan Archiv 13 (1880), pp. 129–336, esp. pp. 175–76: Und zul einem male hatte man nuwe gemeld in dem core gemacht, undz darvoff was ich begirde also ser gerechtig, das si es als gerne hatte gesehen, das es an zimme was. Aber si wider- stür und si selber also vaste, das si es nie wolte geschenken, und darumb machte si Gott wirdig, das sie enes tagen, so d si Gott entspricht, den himmel offen schen, alle die wilde, so d sie durch des cor vonztte z frontal, si d Gott entspricht. Aber ergste si vnser Herre die kleinen zergenenn gesicht mit einem so grossen wündern gesicht.

scheinen in ir sel. Und da ward gesprochen zu ir: 'daz ist mein anfütz, nicht das Veronica enfpfing, snder mein wares und götisches anfütz, daz ewiklich beleiben sol in deiner sel.' Und des enfpfing sie ein sich pfant, das ir dar selb anfütz dar nach oft ward erzeiger mit widerscheiden in ir sel.

92 For a discussion of this passage from the chronicle of Weiler in the context of late medieval devotions to the Veronica, see Hamburger, Vision and the Veronica, in: Hamburger (n. 2).

93 For Gertrude of Helfta, including the distinction between the texts written by Gertrude and those written by her associate, see Kurt Ruh, Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik, Bd. II: Frauenmystik und Franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit, Munich 1993, pp. 314–337 and Ruh, Gertrud von Helfta. Ein neues Gertrud-Bild. Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 121 (1992), pp. 1–20. For a fuller treatment of some of the passages discussed here, see Hamburger (n. 12).

94 For a detailed discussion of this debate in relation to representations of Christ in the later Middle Ages, see Gerhart B. Lader, Ad imaginem Dei: The Image of Man in Medieval Art. Wimmer Lecture XVI. Lutrobe PA, 1965, and Hamburger, Vision and the Veronica, in: Hamburger (n. 15).


98 Alpais de Cudot (n. 97), p. 203: Sed cuisi modi est sinit nulla potuit nobis exemplum describere, quia in hoc mundo non potest invenire eis simile utrae exempla naturae corum mortuorum incognitas possit verboventus exprimere.


101 For the singling out of these two episodes, see Gertrude of Helfta (n. 100), p. 336; translation in Winkworth (n. 100), p. 130. The first of these two incidents, the wounding of Gertrude's heart, is provoked by her meditation on an image of the crucified Christ in a prayerbook; see Hamburger (n. 15).

102 Gertrude of Helfta (n. 100), pp. 260–262.

103 Gertrude (n. 100), p. 266.


105 See the numerous references listed under "cire" in the index to Robert Javelot, Image et semblance au douzième siècle de Saint Anselme à Alain de Lille, 2 vols., Strasbourg 1967, and, for mystical applications of the metaphor, Sigfried Ringers, Viten- und Offenbarungsliiteratur in Frauenklooster des Mittelalters. Quellen und Studien (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 72), Zürich 1980, pp. 275–276. In medieval accounts of mystical union, the comparison of the soul to wax also draws on Psalm 21:15: factum est cor neum tamquam cera liquescens in medio ventris mei.

106 See Stephan Eveson, Aristotle on Perception, Oxford 1997, pp. 57–58, where the translation given is as follows: "In general, with regard to all perception, we must take it that the sense is that which can receive perceivable forms without their matter, as wax receives the imprint of the ring without the iron or gold, and takes the imprint which is only gold or bronze, but not qua gold or bronze." For discussions of Aristotle's metaphor in relation to other, similar accounts of the process of perception, see Mitchell, Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology, Chicago 1989, Ch. 1, esp. 14, n. 13, and Greenstein (n. 27).

107 Javelot (n. 105) vol. II, p. 142, n. 26: "tanta differentia est inter imaginem quae est Filius et imaginem quae est homo, quanta differentia est inter filium regis et formam sigilli impressam, immo multo major est differentia".

108 Cf. the material discussed by Bynum (n. 100), Chapters 7 and 8, esp. p. 333, where she speaks of the sources "shrob[yng] with enthusiasm for the body and for all that to which body gives us access", and according to which, p. 339, "Body is now the access to God." Contemporary to Gertrude, comparisons of the stigmata of St. Francis to seal imprints made on malleable flesh also insisted on corporeal, as opposed to merely formal, likeness. See, e.g., the texts published by Louis-Jacques Baratillon, Les stigmates de Saint François vus par Thomas d'Aquin et quelques autres prédicateurs dominicains, in: Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 90 (1997), pp. 341–347, esp. p. 347.

109 Quoted by Schnitzler (n. 6), p. 39, n. 42.

110 See Bergdolt (n. 10), p. 14, n. 87.

111 Discussed by Schnitzler (n. 6), pp. 70–71.


114 See Bonaventure (n. 113), pp. 51–61, esp. pp. 51 and 61, where Romans 1.20 is duly quoted.

115 See Roger D. Sorrell. St. Francis of Assisi and Nature. Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward


119 See Jeffrey E. Hamburger, Art, Enclosure, and the Curamonticium, in: Hamburger (n. 15).

120 On this subject see the short, but trenchant remarks in Summers (n. 9), pp. 311-313. Frank Tobin, Medieval Thought on Visions and its Resonance in Mechthild of Magdeburg's 'Flowing Light of the Godhead.' in: Anne C. Bartlett (ed.), Vox mystica. Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio, Woodbridge 1995, pp. 41-53 is helpful, but goes too far in minimizing the differences between vision and visions in earlier medieval sources.


122 Belting and Kruse (n. 39) continue to use a dualist framework. For a review of recent debates, see Craig Harbison, De iconologische benadering. In 'Om iets te weten van de oude meesters' (n. 32), pp. 394-432, esp. p. 429, n. 17, where he quotes a remark made by Charles de Tolnay, Flemish Paintings, in: The National Gallery of Art. Magazine of Art 34 (1941), pp. 174-200, esp. p. 174: "The Flemish masters brought the old metaphysical-religious conceptions into harmony with the idea of the worth of earthly existence. By means of a pantheistic turn they combined religious thought with new empirically directed spiritual interests. Their famous 'realism' is actually an adoration of God as immanent in all creation." From the literature I have discussed it should be clear that there is no need to posit pantheism in early Netherlandish painting, nor did the old metaphysical-religious conceptions necessarily exclude an appreciation of nature.

123 Strochita (n. 33).

124 See Marrow (n. 7).

125 See Hamburger (n. 118).

126 In this context, the archaisms and mannerisms of late-fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish take on new meaning, and not simply as a symptom of artistic exhaustion.

127 For the most recent effort to correlate the musical ars nova of the fourteenth century with contemporary philosophy, see Etienne Anheim, Du symbole au signe. Remarques sur la parenté entre Ar nova et nominalisme, in: Médiévaux 32 (1997), pp. 83-96.